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SUBJECT: Pope's Visit Brings "Twitter", Tight Security, and Hopes for Tourism to Jordan

Ref: Amman 990

Summary

1. (SBU) Summary: On May 11, the Pope concluded his four-day visit to Jordan, which took him to Christian and Islamic historical sites and included a mass attended by around 20,000 people. An increased security presence was seen throughout the city with a show of force from both the Jordanian Police and Army. Most Jordanians welcomed the Pope's visit, though some still called for the Pope to formally apologize for comments he made against Islam in his speech at the University of Regensburg. Prince Ghazi (Special Advisor to King Abdullah) was particularly blunt in his welcome to the Pope by praising the Pope's "regret" for the speech, which offended Muslims. Jordan hopes the visit will boost its declining tourism numbers by attracting Christian pilgrims to the religious sites that were visited by the Pope. Queen Rania generated her own excitement over the trip by using "Twitter" for the first time to chronicle the events. End Summary.

King Hopes For Palestinian Statehood

2. (U) King Abdullah's welcoming remarks to the Pope focused on Muslim-Christian understanding as well as concerns over the Holy Land, including safeguarding the Holy City of Jerusalem as a "place of worship for all." The King also stressed the necessity of a "negotiated settlement that fulfills the rights of Palestinians to freedom and statehood, and the right of Israelis to security."

Prince Ghazi Thanks Pope for "Regret" over 2006 Remarks but Islamists Not Appeased

3. (SBU) The Muslim Brotherhood protested the Pope's visit early on because of the Pope's 2006 lecture at the University of Regensburg where he quoted a Byzantine Emperor who equated Islam with violence.

In his address at the King Hussein Mosque to members of the diplomatic corps and religious leaders, Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad Bin Talal (the King's Personal Envoy and Special Advisor) surprised some audience members by using his welcoming remarks to the Pope to speak bluntly about "the hurt caused by this lecture to Muslims." Prince Ghazi further thanked the Pope for expressing "regret" over the incident. Jordanian Islamist leaders, however, were not appeased and called for a clear apology.

Arab Christians Flock to Jordan Amid Tight Security

4. (U) An estimated 20,000 people attended the Pontifical Mass at a stadium in Amman on May 10. Syrian, Lebanese, and Iraqi Christians present brought flags and banners to welcome the Pope. Security was tight throughout Amman with a genuine show of force from both the Army and the police. Trucks filled with soldiers were also seen throughout the city. The stadium itself was filled with plain

clothed police officers and the Jordanian Army interspersed itself between the police force to form a perimeter around the stage where the Pope spoke.

#### Jordanians Use Mass to Highlight Hospitality to Iraqi Refugees

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¶5. (SBU) In his welcome, Monsignor Fouad Twal, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, extended Jordan's hospitality to the Pope and emphasized that Jordan has shown evidence of this hospitality in the past by welcoming in "one million" Iraqi refugees "after the American invasion of Iraq." (Note: By all estimates he overstated drastically the number of Iraqi refugees in Jordan. End Note.)

#### Pope Called for Building Bridges and Respect for Women, Praised King's Inter-Religious Dialogue

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¶6. (U) The Pope began his portion of the mass by saying in Arabic "Al salam Aliekum" (Peace be with you). He called for peace in the Middle East and said that Muslims and Christians must "build new bridges." The Pope also urged greater respect for women, saying that the "God-given role of the dignity of women has not always been understood and esteemed." The Pope concluded his visit to Jordan by thanking the King and Queen for their hospitality and praising King Abdullah's efforts to "foster inter-religious dialogue." The Pope also commented on "Jordan's far-sighted political initiatives to build peace throughout the Middle East."

#### Jordan Hopes For Tourism Boost, Queen Uses Twitter to Document Visit

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AMMAN 00001115 002 OF 002

¶7. (U) The Jordanians used the Pope's visit and its widespread coverage in the international media to promote tourism and hopes are high that it will spark travel to the country's religious sites. Restaurants had special menus for the visit, commemorative stamps were issued, and local newspapers described the events as a "pilgrimage" in the hopes that other pilgrims will follow.

¶8. (U) Queen Rania, adept at social media forums, used "Twitter" for the first time to chronicle the events. She posted comments throughout the visit, and wrote "just listened to Pope's speech, our region so needs a message of peace."

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